



■ Williams and Stinson demonstrate a passing drill. Picture by JAFFAR ALI



■ From left, coach Hussain, Abdullah, Hassan, Ammar, Hameed and coach Mazen Esmail

INSPIRED!

● Clinic participants dream of playing in NBA

By PATRICK SALOMON

BAHRAIN'S aspiring young basketball players were yesterday united in admiration of former National Basketball Association (NBA) star Jerome Williams and ex-Women's NBA (WNBA) standout Andre Stinson, who are in the kingdom this week conducting the SportsUnited clinic.

The event got underway with its first two on-the-court sessions at the Zain Bahrain Basketball Arena in Um Al Hasnan yesterday, with up to 100 children, both boys and girls, taking part. Kids aged 11 to 14 had their clinic in the morning, followed by those aged 15 to 18 in the afternoon. The same players will return today for a final session in each age group.

Williams and Stinson facilitated the proceedings and personally interacted with the children all day. The 'NBA Cares' ambassadors were at the heart of every drill and lesson, and their involvement clearly made its mark on each and every participant.

"They are really good and they teach us many new things in the drills and with basketball techniques, it's really been a great time for me," said 13-year-old Al Hala Club player Hussain Esmail Hassan.

"To get the chance to meet and play and exercise with them is a completely new experience," added Hameed Yousef of Al Akh, also 13. "We're very happy to be a part of it."

The chance to interact with Williams



■ Williams speaks to the children

and Stinson has inspired many of the youngsters to work harder to achieve their dreams of one day playing professionally, maybe even in the NBA.

"It is my dream, of course, to play in such a great league like the NBA, meeting an NBA player like Williams makes me want to go after that dream even more," said 14-year-old Abdullah Karim of Bahrain Club.

"Getting the chance to see how they work makes me want to work harder and give more effort so I can be the best. Hopefully, in a couple of years, I will have improved a lot and maybe be like Williams. He is a very exciting player and a very funny person, and it is very nice to get to talk to him and to learn basketball from him."

Added Hameed: "I've seen Williams play on video and I think he is very good. After meeting him, I want to give

more effort as a basketball player and maybe one day play outside of the country, maybe even be in the NBA like them."

Manama Club's Ammar Mousa Habib, another 14-year-old, was initially speechless when asked how much the clinic means to him as a young, learning basketball player. "It means a lot to me," he eventually answered. "They are teaching us many new and helpful things, and I have learned a lot from our first day in the clinic, especially about playing smart and teamwork," he said.

Assisting

The children aren't the only ones gaining from the event. Manama Club's Ali Hussain - who is the head technician of their under-12 and under-14 squads - is one of several Bahraini coaches assisting Williams and Stinson in the clinic.

Hussain has participated in many similar programmes locally and in Europe, but says that this is his first with NBA players involved and admits it is one of the most unique.

"This is truly a special event for all these kids and for Bahrain basketball as a whole, and is very exciting for all of us involved," said coach Hussain.

"Jerome Williams and Andre Stinson are doing a great thing in this camp, utilising their fame as professional basketball players to inspire our kids."

"This is a very good and important event for all of us here in Bahrain, but what's even more important is we have continuity after it is done. Our job does not end here; we must continue to work hard and use the new things we learned so that we can build from this."

"We must thank the NBA, the US Embassy and our Bahrain sports offices for holding this clinic."

'NBA Cares' is the NBA's social responsibility initiative. 'SportsUnited' is the sports envoy programme of the US State Department, and Williams and Stinson are the special basketball envoys.

The clinic has been organized locally by the US Embassy of Bahrain, the General Organisation for Youth and Sports, the Bahrain Basketball Association, and the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Department at Naval Support Activity-Bahrain.

Today will be the final day of clinics for the Bahraini youngsters. Tonight, Goya president Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa will host a dinner for Williams and Stinson.